



R

# RESEARCH REPORT

ROUNDTABLES ON BEST PRACTICES  
ADDRESSING HOMELESSNESS

BACKGROUND REPORTS AND SUMMARIES

DISTINCT  
HOUSING NEEDS  
SERIES



HOME TO CANADIANS  
Canada

## CMHC—Home to Canadians

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) is home to Canadians. In everything we do, we help Canadians live in safe, secure homes. As the Government of Canada's national housing agency, we play a major role in Canada's housing industry. CMHC develops new ways to finance home purchases. We encourage innovation in housing design and technology. Our mortgage loan insurance helps Canadians realize their dream of owning a home.

Canadians benefit from our work with public, private and not-for-profit partners to improve the quality, accessibility and affordability of housing everywhere in Canada.

CMHC assistance helps low-income and older Canadians, people with disabilities and Aboriginals live in decent, affordable homes. We create jobs for Canadians with products and services that help the housing industry export its knowledge and skills to other countries.

CMHC's leading-edge research improves the quality and affordability of housing. To help Canadians benefit from our housing expertise and make informed decisions, CMHC has become Canada's largest publisher of housing information. We also have Canada's most comprehensive selection of information about homes and housing.

Canadians can easily access our information through retail outlets and CMHC's regional offices.

You can also reach us by phone at

1 800 668-2642 (outside Canada, (613) 748-2003)

by fax at (613) 748-4069

To reach us online, visit our home page at [www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca](http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca)

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation supports the Government of Canada policy on access to information for people with disabilities. If you wish to obtain this publication in alternative formats, call 1 800 668-2642.

# ***Roundtables on Best Practices Addressing Homelessness***

## ***Background Reports and Summaries***

CMHC offers a wide range of housing-related information. For details, call 1 800 668-2642 or visit our Web site at [www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca](http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca)

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre: *Tables rondes sur les pratiques exemplaires d'intervention auprès des sans-abri : Documents d'information et résumés*; PF0356

This research project was funded by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation ("CMHC"). The contents, views and editorial quality of this report are the responsibility of the author(s) and CMHC accepts no responsibility for them or any consequences arising from the reader's use of the information, materials and techniques described herein.

© 1999 Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, mechanical, electronic, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior written permission of Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. Without limiting the generality of the foregoing no portion of this book may be translated from English into any other language without the prior written permission of Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

Printed in Canada  
Produced by CMHC



## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

---

<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>ATLANTIC REGIONAL ROUNDTABLE .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>QUEBEC REGIONAL ROUNDTABLE .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>ONTARIO REGIONAL ROUNDTABLE .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>PRAIRIES, NUNAVUT AND NORTHWEST TERRITORIES REGIONAL ROUNDTABLE .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>BRITISH COLUMBIA AND YUKON REGIONAL ROUNDTABLE .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>NATIONAL ROUNDTABLE .....</b>	<b>30</b>



## INTRODUCTION

---

In response to needs expressed by organizations working with homeless persons, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) sponsored and co-hosted a series of roundtables on "best practices" addressing homelessness. Five regional roundtables took place during the month of April 1999 and the national roundtable was held in June.

The goals of the roundtables were:

- to bring together front line agencies and other key people directly involved with the homeless population; to explore successful approaches ("best practices") to addressing homelessness;
- to provide opportunities for the exchange of information among practitioners;
- to facilitate new links for partnership opportunities in the development of solutions; and
- to support the creation or enlargement of information networks.

Roundtable participants used the *Documentation of Best Practices Addressing Homelessness* as a basis for discussion. The ten documented "best practices", projects that have effectively addressed the needs of homeless people and those "at risk" of homelessness, represent a broad range of responses applicable to the diversity of the homeless population throughout the country. They were written by the agencies themselves, with funding from CMHC. The publication is available from the Canadian Housing Information Centre (1-800-668-2642).

The regional roundtables were co-hosted by local or regional agencies involved in homelessness. These agencies also prepared background reports, noting key regional issues and trends affecting homelessness. Sessions were limited to a small number of invited participants, primarily front line agency representatives, in order to ensure that the goals of networking, information sharing, and partnership building could more easily be met.

Representatives from the regional roundtables brought the results of their sessions to the national roundtable, which was co-hosted by CMHC, Raising the Roof, the Urban Core Support Network, and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. Attendance was limited to co-hosts and other delegates from the regional roundtables; and a small number of provincial and federal government representatives and national organizations involved in homelessness. A number of federal government departments provided funds to enable front line workers to attend the roundtables.

This document provides background reports and summaries from each of the five regional roundtables, as well as the summary from the national roundtable.

# ATLANTIC REGIONAL ROUNDTABLE

---

## **Snap Shot on Homelessness in the Atlantic Region**

### **Regional background report for the Atlantic Roundtable on Best Practices Addressing Homelessness**

Organizations providing housing related services whether emergency shelters, second stage housing, or non profit housing, across the Atlantic provinces articulated several common themes. The first was a very receptive response to an opportunity to meet with others doing similar work. People are interested in sharing successes and discussing strategies for effective solutions. All organizations are committed to and understand the challenges of addressing housing and related needs of citizens in our region who are at risk of, or are presently experiencing difficulty in maintaining adequate, safe, affordable housing. Most organizations are faced with limited resources in providing the type of housing needed. A number of groups are enthusiastic about innovative projects they are now working on, and hope to realize in the immediate future. We look forward to learning from their collective experiences.

Although most contacts were urban based (my apologies to those of you not contacted) a theme which impacted all communities was the lack of housing options for low income single adults. Specifically single people who are identified by what we have come to refer to as people with "special needs". People at risk of, or presently experiencing homelessness included: single women attempting to become re-established after fleeing an abusive relationship, and single adults with long term mental health/addiction or lifestyle related issues. Newfoundland and Nova Scotia also mentioned homelessness among male youth. Every province made reference to low social assistance rates, including shelter allowances which were unrealistic compared to market rents, as a contributing factor to the risk of homelessness.

There are a number of ways all provinces are addressing these issues. In New Brunswick, a shelter is renting to some of it's clients in order to avoid sub standard rooming house options. Second stage housing organizations despite limited resources and dependence on volunteers, are continually looking for creative ways to fund and administer self help programs aimed at supporting the needs of women who are being temporarily housed in second stage units. P.E.I. is looking at creative ways to open and operate a supportive housing facility for people with addiction issues.

Regardless of the level of engagement in housing provision, organizations in all four provinces expressed the need for supportive housing for people experiencing difficulty maintaining independent living. Housing organizations in Newfoundland are actively lobbying for more collaboration between the three levels of government. There is also a need for collaboration between ministerial departments within the provincial government and housing organizations in the community. Other provinces are also struggling with this issue; most have creative relationships with one or more government departments.

Although mentioned in every province, urban centres in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia in particular are concerned with sub standard housing, particularly for low income single people but also impacting families. Substandard rooming houses which are not licenced, poorly maintained, and inadequately managed are common to both provinces. Apartment buildings which are not up to code, poorly maintained and generally substandard are prevalent. Low income families in both N.B. and N.S. are forced to live in these units due to a lack of affordable housing options.

Although vacancy levels vary in each province, affordable housing is a common concern. Organizations expressed that private market housing has not been able to meet the need and

creative approaches from the non profit sector must be supported. This support must include collaboration between government agencies and community organizations. The exception regarding availability of affordable units (other than for people with special needs) is Newfoundland. High outward migration in NFLD is creating a high vacancy rate in both rural and urban communities. The Provincial Housing Authority in Newfoundland presently has three and four bedroom units available in many communities across the Province.

Given the reality of housing issues in our region it appears timely that the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation is providing us the opportunity to come together to discuss our common concerns. I have had the opportunity of discussing these issues with some of you. From those conversations I believe the goals of the Regional Round Table are ones which will not only be met but obviously surpassed with our time together at the Atlantic Regional Round Table.

Together with Carol Charlebois of Metro Non Profit Housing Association and the members of the C.M.H.C. committee who have helped to organize this event, I look forward to sharing and hearing more about the models, methods, and strategies which housing organizations in the Atlantic Regions are actively pursuing. I know that despite the difficulties and challenges of this work we are all proud of the level of service our organizations are able to provide. It is also evident that we struggle with persistence and have made impacts on housing needs in our communities. Housing organizations in the Atlantic Region have demonstrated a positive approach and commitment to, working on behalf of, and together with those at risk of homelessness. Again I look forward to meeting with you on April 24.

*Written by:*  
*Paul O'Hara*  
*North End Community Health Centre*

## **Atlantic Region Roundtable on Best Practices Addressing Homelessness Halifax, April 24, 1999**

*Celebrate that which you want to see more of...*

The Atlantic Roundtable on Best Practices Addressing Homelessness created a wonderful community-building opportunity for a diverse group of 35 people from front-line agencies; municipal, provincial and federal government departments; and those who had experienced homelessness at some point in their lives. All four of the Atlantic Provinces were well represented at the meeting. The coffee and conversation flowed all day, enhancing the good will that existed already in the group. The purpose of the meeting was:

- to create a network opportunity for people working with homelessness in the region,
- to share our own best practices and identify the factors that support success in the region and
- to explore ways to strengthen and create best practices in the region.

### **Getting to Know Each Other—Our Common Starting Point**

We began our day with a Native blessing offered by a Native Elder, asking, on behalf of the group, for guidance and focus to the gathering. After introductions, the group was asked to identify their common starting point, given that each person around the table represented a unique life experience and point of view on the issues of homelessness. The group discovered that they shared the following:

- A common sense of social justice and a belief that everyone has a right to housing
- Commitment to moving forward, to recognize we need to do a better job listening to clients and taking that information and using it
- Responsibility for decision and a willingness to work hard and be creative
- All trying to provide service to homeless; talked about definition of homelessness and all had different versions; focus is to add on another dimension to encompass some more



family oriented issues; to broaden the definition to include a lot of other groups/people—not just single people

- Struggle with professional vs. the client voice discussing the problem—it was felt at first that the voice of homeless people was absent
- struggle with rural perspective vs. urban perspective in the realities of homelessness
- Homeless citizens have to be organized in their struggle there are lots of barriers in this struggle.

### **Best Practices—Our Golden Innovations In the Region**

The second item on the agenda was to share stories of golden innovations (a metaphor for best practices) in the region so that we could begin mapping the trends of what we know works. Each person presented an example of something they had seen or been a part of in the region—a project or a program (large or small) that worked. The following list summarizes some of the key Golden Innovations:

- **Construction of new housing using innovative funding arrangements and partnerships.** For example getting land and mortgage insurance through CMHC, province offering a one-time development grant, in-kind services (professionals), employment project through HRDC, regional development authority providing a grant and mortgaging the rest of building. Also, getting land for a dollar, waiving fees for permits, tax deferral and exemptions for residents whose incomes are under \$20,000. The use of CMHC grants for a feasibility study resulting in the creation of a duplex bought with one side used for detox services – receiving fees for government for services performed; the other side of the duplex is used to house homeless people (detoxified).
- **Multiple partners**—province; municipality; corporate; community non-profit; private—professionals—i.e. Design engineers. Municipal and Housing / Community Services and HRDCNB working together.
- **Municipal Housing** provides the house; community service provides clients and caseworkers; HRDC NB—rental unit provided to 5 or 6 special needs individuals—caseworkers remain involved.
- **Using resources currently existing in the community but not already focused on homelessness.** For example, as a course project, a civil engineering class from UNB has adopted second stage housing project—are rebuilding a property—materials and equipment are donated. One community that experienced significant substance abuse problems, particularly on weekends, opened the gym of the school to allow children without parental supervision a safe place to sleep / eat—the gym is supervised by community members.
- **Providing intensive home and community supports** to individuals who have been written off by formal mental health. Diversifying agency services to adjust to the client's needs as they reintegrate into the community. This can also include the development of supervised apartment spaces to support the transition phase of reintegration as well as extended care for released inmates in the process of re-establishing themselves through a homeless shelter.
- **Mixed home ownership**—moderate to low income supportive housing with community based programming. Mix of high income and low income people in one of the cities most sought after addresses. Also by creating smaller Public Units in "Good" Areas—large scale projects risk becoming ghettos; self-build programs also have good potential for positive results. Private Landlord Rent Supplement was another example of working with existing or new rental properties to foster mixed income neighborhoods and let people live where they wish.
- **Government subsidized housing** developed by the community. Proposal for New Brunswick Housing Trust Fund that would

provide actual dollars to non-profit to develop/renovate new housing initiatives. The idea developed by grant from Homegrown Solutions.

- **Community based housing partnerships**—co-housing; land sharing; shared operations; creation of community network; funding; program evaluation. This facilitative management model involves tenants in “all” aspects of building management
- **Preventing homelessness** through a variety of approaches: creating access to housing for disabled—by renovating units for people with disabilities to ensure they have affordable housing. Also by reconfiguring units and reducing density, a simple shift in design can facilitate both formal and informal policing to “clean up” the neighborhood, reducing drug use and crime. Also finding ways within government to say yes to restricted items like bus passes to facilitate search for housing. Eviction prevention through outreach.
- **Homeless network**—activism increased the level of community awareness which has lead to a more responsive political and department; response to issues of rooming houses.
- **Wraparound services**—trying to bring services to the client not the client to the services. Outreach—ex-residents can return for counseling, support, referrals, etc.. Recreational Places for homeless person who would like a place for doing hobbies with a workshop. Using a shelter unit’s office address for clients to have as their own for the purpose of collecting messages and mail. Creativity Center—“Poetical Asylum” places for people to create in natural surroundings, share food, take responsibility for the place, and build spirit.
- **Social justice and self-help**—build homes for social services recipients by social service recipients, training for people involved gave them pride in workmanship and self-confidence and a home. “Sweat equity” HRDC can provide funding currently
- **Safe houses in community**—Universal shelter association is a network of 11 houses to date who offer to take in women and men who are experiencing violence in their homes.
- **Shift in approach from rehab to harm reduction**—including extended hours, extended time of stay work with listen to clients, client involved in determining solutions—staff clients now involved at board level.
- **Cross-reference social assistance address database with city inspectors**—St. John’s properties rented to people receiving allowances for shelter are listed with inspectors so that building condition can be monitored—fines for infractions raised
- **Accessibility committee**—a body struck to examine all aspects of how accessible (in the broad sense of fairness and inclusion as well as mobility) an organization or program is comprehensive consideration of how we support and facilitate “deconstruction of separation”
- **Develop partnerships** with other helping agencies building consensus among partners, sharing a diversity of knowledge, and making best use of a combination of diverse social backgrounds, community perspectives in a multi-level way. These partnerships support Fund Raising and Building PR by using key “high profile” people in the community and business world to support you in the public eye.

### The Factors Supporting Best Practices

After a short break, participants were asked to mill about the room reading the examples displayed by other groups and looking for common elements that supported these best practices. The resulting synthesis indicates that

the common factors supporting Best Practices in the region are:

- Strategies are proactive, have community involvement and are client-drive.
- Partnerships—money from different sources, multiple stakeholders—partners—community, govt., private sector
- Client centered programs that are culturally inclusive, and all programs are determined, designed and co-run by clients
- Staff are fully diverse, representing each community being served
- Vision and leadership exist with great determination and drive to “find a way”
- Consensus exists among different levels of government
- Constructive approach based on strengths rather than faults, risk taking and perseverance
- Bureaucratic obstacles were eliminated to meet needs
- Attitude / belief exists that all people have a right to housing
- Entrepreneurial thinking—innovation and creativity
- Public support and activism
- Getting new people and groups involved in housing and homelessness
- Climate for conversation—looking at opportunities
- Multiple range of solutions—move to permanent housing solutions
- Infrastructure used was already in place in resources, skills etc.

#### **Finding Ways to Strengthen our Practices in the Atlantic Region**

During this part of the session, people met in groups by similar interest to explore:

- the challenges or obstacles (reasons) why this particular element is hard to create in the region
- Possible ways around these obstacles—to strengthen this element.

The factors that were chosen and discussed during this period were:

**Working with Infrastructure That’s Already in Place**—The major obstacles identified by this group included the difficulty of working with the bureaucracy and funding that can be a “mixed bag” when you need to get things done with multiple needs and sources. Also the inability to use other forms of housing such as government warehouses.

The group agreed that more knowledge of what the community has to offer is necessary, also the need to work at many levels at same time, recognizing each other’s talents. Agencies need access to high risk financing without paying the high risk rates, direct lending programs (need the most competitive rates) in order to work with banks to establish mortgages for groups or individuals.

**Consensus Among Different Levels of Government**—This group discussed the issue of government trying to work closer together but not always succeeding. The desire for one entry point was expressed as well as the hope for a more coordinated approach. Although group members recognized that efforts are being made, there is recognition of the fact that much work still needs to be done.

**Climate for Conversation—Looking at Opportunities**—This group acknowledged that presently there is a lack of a good network for solving problems related to homelessness. There was an expressed need for a structure to create and to allow people the opportunity to network and problem solve. This group suggested the need for seed money to set up a database and website for newsletters, information, etc.. It was agreed that the idea would be presented in Ottawa to create an Association of Atlantic Canada Homeless Shelters. A committee of four volunteers was established to work on a proposal.

**Partnerships**—The group acknowledged the public misconception and stereotyping of homeless (drinking, etc.), making it difficult to



attract partners to work with. The limited resources (staff, etc.) and the different types of needs limit the in-house resources to develop partnerships.

**Eliminate Bureaucratic Obstacles**—The group was unanimous in its opinion that public policies need to change, community mobilization must clear out obstacles based on social audits. All agreed that it was difficult to do, but they should continue trying to find sympathetic bureaucrats to sit on Boards.

**Strategies are Proactive and Client Driven**—The group discussed the importance of involving clients directly in finding solutions and taking ownership of their own success. If clients take ownership, they will try harder to make a success. It is important to have a non-judgmental attitude and not to put expectations on people, assuming what the client knows or doesn't know. It's a slow process but more and more people are getting involved in this approach.

### **Closure and Highlights**

Evaluative comments at the end of the session indicated that the objectives for the day—to network, to share and to explore—had all been met. The group discussed the necessity for continued forums such as these to gather ideas for ongoing support in all areas of the Atlantic.

# QUEBEC REGIONAL ROUNDTABLE

---

## Regional background report for the Quebec Roundtable on Best Practices Addressing Homelessness

### Status

The data published this year by the research organization Santé-Québec [Health Quebec] indicated that, in Montréal alone, twice as many people in need had visited homelessness resources since 1989. It was revealed that, in Quebec City, a total of 11,000 persons used these homelessness resources. In several other cities across Quebec, Réseau-solidarité-itinérance [homelessness solidarity network] member groups have noted an increase in visits to short- and medium-term shelter resources in the last two years. This data is a source of concern, all the more so since there has not been any significant development in social housing for homeless persons since 1992. In the face of these constraints, community organizations have had to deal with an increase in a client group composed of more people experiencing economic and social difficulties.

### Some avenues for solutions under consideration

In view of these findings, the path taken by people towards homelessness raises the question of how to work with this population. The practices followed by community resources are based on a global approach to the problems, that is, one which takes into account the social, economic and cultural reality of the person. As well, it is important to have practices that are likely to lead to long-term success, for both the people themselves and the workers in this sector. This notion of success can also be seen as a homelessness prevention role, aimed at saving people from ending up on the street.

The issue of housing is in fact essential when speaking of homelessness. But, in itself, housing

cannot ensure people's stability. For example, the formula of social housing with community support offers an effective alternative that, in many cases, meets the needs of homeless persons. FOHM (Fédération d'OSBL d'habitation de Montréal) [Montréal federation of housing non-profit organizations] homes, for instance, have demonstrated the validity of these initiatives. As well, for FOHM: "the recognition, development and financing of permanent social housing units with community support is a major determining factor in the implementation of prevention initiatives and the promotion of health and well-being, as well as a priority access route to social integration."

The year 2000 challenge for the development of social housing with community support is to renew the practices taking into account all the components of the homeless population. For example, young people are expressing certain needs related to residential stability and social integration that call for specific responses on the part of social practices. As well, the same finding applies to the reality of homeless women. It is important to understand homelessness in order to reduce its consequences. In this respect, it is necessary to observe the paths of the different components of the homeless population: namely men, women and youth.

This context of impoverishment and marginalization of different sectors of the Quebec population is the basis for this roundtable on best practices. It would be desirable at this time to gather all the players (political, community and other partners) in order to open up some avenues for solutions within our grasp in relation to the needs expressed by this population and also to the already existing practices.

*Written by:*

*Reseau d'aide aux personnes seules et itinérantes de Montréal, Inc. (RAPSIM)*

## **Quebec Roundtable on Best Practices Addressing Homelessness Montréal, April 16, 1999**

Over thirty stakeholders from the community, municipalities and institutions gathered at the Québec CMHC roundtable on best practices addressing homelessness. The regions represented were Trois-Rivières, Québec, Drummondville, Sherbrooke, Nicolet, Hull and Montréal.

The roundtable context provided the opportunity to discuss day-to-day best practices within the community-based organizations. At the session's opening, René Charest mentioned that we have to recognize the community practices as a whole, and ensure that there is adequate funding to meet the needs of homeless individuals.

### **Introductions**

The participants were asked to comment on CMHC's initiative to document best practices and on their own interest in participating in this meeting. Many participants expressed the need to identify the commonalities in the best practices and to establish links. Each of the best practices presented exists within a context: a network and a continuum of services which do not appear in the document. It is important to identify the minimum conditions for success and organizing tools, because what characterizes each milieu, beyond its differences and its poverty, is the solidarity and joint intervention that transcend the boundaries. Homelessness is part of the sad landscape of poverty and lack of social identity.

Participants also questioned the confusion that seems to exist in the documentation around the use of various terms and expressions, particularly on the issue of social housing with community and post-sheltering support. This confusion is most likely due to translation and/or the varied continuum of services in different projects.

*"Ideas are not enough; we need money to make them happen!"*

Several critiques focused on the State's withdrawal from financing social housing, as well as the role of elected representatives with respect to homelessness. Elected representatives do not recognize the problem of homelessness as such, only the problem of poverty. Mrs. Claudette Bradshaw, the new Minister for Homelessness, appointed by the federal government, has neither the budget nor the staff resources to deal with the situation. This is symptomatic of the lack of interest in the issue. The government's decision to withdraw from financing social housing is confusing. Minister Gagliano announced a \$50 million investment for housing renovation programs that will not benefit homeless people but rather homeowners. Homeless people are left out. Everyone agrees that a political decision has to be made to inject money into social housing.

Others questioned CMHC's initiative in terms of the objectives of this meeting. Among the important issues which need to be addressed—What government policies would ensure homeless people are housed adequately? Where are the budget envelopes? There must be money available for the development of worthwhile projects. Without the funds, we cannot develop our practices; and if there were money available, what type of project would we recommend? What can be done for these individuals' growing social isolation?

### **What are the essential aspects of social housing practices in relation to the problem of homelessness?**

Conditions for successful social housing for homeless people were identified:

- **Social housing with community support constitutes the best practice in light of every individual's right to affordable and healthy housing.** A housing policy and program were identified as necessities. Social housing with community support is the basis of survival for people and is also a

fundamental condition for social integration. The recognition of the right to housing provides support to intervene before a crisis occurs. Individuals' needs for social housing must be identified and examined, and support must be provided.

- **Interventions must exist at many levels and must be integrated.** It is a mistake to focus on one best practice project because this compartmentalizes resources and produces undesired effects. A diversity of services is preferable. Community-based action has shown its ability to develop new techniques and has proven its innovation and creativity. Our organizations are very creative but without the proper resources, goals cannot be achieved. Why not support the ongoing projects, while we are poorly funded and the needs are there? We should acknowledge the work being done with the existing resources before promoting new ways of doing things. Generally speaking, when the focus is on "innovation", it is because there is no more money and other sources of funding have to be found. Why not first consolidate the existing resources?
- **Recognizing community resources vs. institutional resources.** Community-based initiatives in a region have difficulty sustaining themselves because of the lack of funding. Community resources have to be recognized as such and adequately financed. On the other hand, institutional resources have practices that are less anchored in the community. The health and social services' budget is not redistributed in the community, therefore parallel services networks are built but not adapted to the needs of the community. The danger of institutional resources is "professionalizing" services, and, once again, not recognizing the work accomplished by the community, which is being left with only a caretaking role. The community should be in a position to provide the services that are required.
- **The needs of the clients.** We need to focus on the needs of the population we are working with. One example is the lack of independent housing for young women who have no money.
- **Relationship with the community.** Neighbourhood improvement projects that are implemented within the urban space and according to local needs should also be supported. These projects could have positive effects on people's relationship with the community, in particular, less recourse to legal action, more extensive occupancy of public spaces and better integration into different communities. However, this integration can prove difficult when the outcome of some real estate projects is gentrification of a neighbourhood. The new owners have very high expectations for the neighbourhood's "quality of life", without taking into consideration the environment's dynamics and lifestyle.
- **Categories.** Must specific practices be developed based on the different categories of homeless population (men, women, youth, seniors...)? In fact, we cannot ignore existing social life relationships. Homelessness is often described as a male adult reality, while women and youth have specific needs. This reality is overlooked in many organizations. Society is not neutral, it is a capitalistic and sexist society. Nevertheless, there are limits to classification; we must accommodate everyone in our work, but the differences must not be used to define our programs. It is important to identify categories, without creating "boxes". The State does not have to recognize these categories, but it must ensure that they are not omitted in our practice. These categories have to reflect the needs of the population. For example, recognizing the specific housing requirements for homeless women may reduce harassment and abuse problems they encounter in some locations. These women have to be strong to live in a mixed environment. Because of the level of prior victimization, isn't it important



to have specific programs that will alleviate the problem?

Mixing age categories can sometimes create problems, but cohabitation is possible. It is particularly in emergency shelters that this situation arises. Nevertheless, this type of cohabitation is possible as long as the appropriate measures are taken to create a living environment that meets the needs of the group.

#### **How to encourage the participation of staff and homeless people in local projects**

In most of the best practices we find a structure that includes a board of directors, an executive council, the staff and the users. But are there other models that would enable the integration of staff and users into the structures? People directly involved often possess the expertise and there should be a way to include their experience.

Community-based organizations are concerned about user participation and they wonder how they can encourage it. Concerted effort is required before community action can be taken. Some prerequisites are:

- 1) minimum living conditions are required to mobilize users;
- 2) encouragement to participate;
- 3) the search for identity is important to allow the users to develop a sense of belonging and to develop aptitudes and skills—they often have to deal with personal problems; and
- 4) a pressing need for visible short-term results.

Furthermore, the empowerment approach has to be viewed broadly to meet new objectives such as creating space for community. Identification is important in the empowerment approach because it supports the ability to act and recognizes each individual as a citizen. In addition, people's rhythm and their decision to participate or not must be respected. Taking charge can be difficult for some people. The empowerment approach provides them the opportunity to take part in their project and to take some initiative. This method can be less stressful because it is more integrated.

We have to recognize and emphasize the need for these individuals' involvement and include it in our structures. In this approach, the presence of community organizations or agencies which support the group seems to be the key. It is idealistic to think that this can be achieved through volunteers and goodwill alone. People can take charge of their lives, but they also need support.

A distinction was made between symbolic participation and real participation. User involvement requires a great deal of time and energy. Structures have to be established to encourage real representation. But these investments strengthen the staff members, residents and also the former residents who often become more involved.

Finally, the users usually communicate verbally rather than in writing. They don't use documents, agendas, etc. to carry out their functions. Therefore we have to accept being "disorganized" because this constitutes a major strength and may allow us to develop new practices.

#### **What conditions are conducive to putting these important aspects into practice:**

The reports from the related workshops point out favourable conditions related to housing needs, financing and the clients' reality:

- **A broad housing policy.** The financial assistance to create housing with community support, but also money to support the current and future social housing. At the federal level, request a sound reinvestment in social housing programs and consideration of community organizations' requests.
- **Improve social housing.** Homeless people seem to be the deprived clientele. Consequently, to respect these individuals' needs, greater living space, beyond basic conditions, should be provided. Amend the National Building Code to improve personal comfort (particularly in terms of noise).
- **Recognition of community action.** Provide community-based support by recognizing and

consolidating existing resources. Develop projects with a community approach.

- **Political will.** Political commitment and will are necessary to support a social housing policy; we must remember that residential support for people can be socially profitable.
- **Removal of the penalty for sharing housing.** Abolish the penalty for sharing housing imposed by Income Security. Abolishing this measure would provide stable housing for low-income individuals without reducing their already very low income.

#### Issues and recommendations

The last part of the session focused on the important issues and questions to be presented to the national roundtable by our regional delegates. Two core elements came out in the discussions. The first one: the implementation of a national social housing policy and community support; the second one: adequate funding for this program. The federal government is asked to invest money for the establishment of a national social housing policy. If no money is invested for social housing, all the work accomplished will be useless.

Other major concerns were raised and identified as conditions for achievement:

- community organizations should be in a position to define the requirements for these activities;
- as a prerequisite to providing supportive social housing, the recognition and consolidation of the community agencies offering this support is required;
- a federal policy would enhance a provincial housing policy;
- money injected into such a program should not be derived from profits made at the expense of the poor, i.e., the employment insurance surplus. No "Millennium Housing";
- a concern for harmonizing social policies. Focus on poverty; question the policies that continue to impoverish and exclude. For example: Income Security that imposes a cutback for sharing housing; the zero tolerance principle in police authority that is contradictory to the prevention and crime reduction approach;
- the importance of preparing a full report on the homelessness phenomenon and listing the Québec Health census figures, which reveal a significant problem. The report prepared by the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights indicates that Canada and the provinces are capable of taking care of impoverished and homeless people. Let a political will develop in this direction. Creativity and concerted action will occur if financial assistance is provided.

# ONTARIO REGIONAL ROUNDTABLE

---

## **Regional background report for the Ontario Roundtable on Best Practices Addressing Homelessness**

Several key changes in attitudes and circumstances surrounding homelessness over the past ten to 15 years have affected the way that frontline workers serving the homeless population do their job.

The first is that homelessness is being defined more broadly. Today, we include the "at risk" and "hidden" homeless people whose tenure is threatened by rents that exceed reasonable proportions of their income as well as the more visible literally homeless people. The stereotype of homeless single men with alcohol problems still exists but homelessness now includes significant numbers of youth, families and single women. This is reflected in the broad range of agency mandates.

Another key change is that homelessness is no longer simply just a big city problem. Towns and cities throughout Ontario such as Thunder Bay, Kenora, Ottawa, Kingston, London, St Catharines and Barrie are also dealing with homelessness. But as the recent Provincial Task Force on Homelessness pointed out, there is a considerable variability in levels of awareness, commitment and ability to deal constructively with the complex problems of homelessness.

In the past 18 months, Ontario communities have also been dealing with a large number of structural changes to the fiscal relationship between the Province and municipalities. The devolvement of responsibilities for key services such as social housing, welfare and other matters affecting shelter combined with cuts in service and the lack of new social housing has added to these difficulties.

A third noticeable difference is that concerned individuals, ranging from frontline workers,

policy makers, volunteers and faith communities to politicians and the general public now acknowledge that there is no single solution to homelessness. The problem is a lack of affordable housing—very little rental housing is being built anywhere in the province. The problem is also a lack of adequate support services for those with mental illness or with alcohol and drug problems. But another underlying issue is poverty. In Toronto alone, more than 100,000 jobs were lost during the recession. Many remaining jobs are low paying while cuts in social assistance and welfare have had a severe effect on people's ability to fend for themselves. As Ontario's economy recovered, large numbers of people were unable to benefit, resulting in a growing spread between the haves and have-nots. The downside to improved understanding of the complexity of these problems is that this emphasizes the lack of overall leadership to take concerted action.

In cities and towns across Ontario, the least well-off and most vulnerable sectors of society are suffering a steady decline in their standard of living. Two groups experiencing homelessness disproportionate to the overall population are people with severe mental illness and native people. The Greater Toronto Area has traditionally served as a gateway for immigrants and refugees, but increasing numbers of these groups are requiring shelter and other services.

As pointed out in the recently released Mayor's Homelessness Action Task Force, the scale of Toronto's homelessness problem is enormous. An average of 3,200 people use shelters throughout the year (1996 figures), a number that rises significantly in winter. Because nearly half the people relying on shelters are from outside Toronto, the city's resources are severely stretched. Statistics on shelter use indicate a rise in the number of families with children, while many (17% in 1996) are chronic users of the system, using a disproportionate share of shelter

resources. A disturbing trend is that more children are homeless than ever before.

In Ontario, three provincial ministries funded services to address homelessness: Community and Social Services, Health, and Municipal Affairs & Housing. Traditionally, each ministry contributed funds directly or through municipalities to frontline agencies. Large scale structural changes to the delivery of services has also been complicated by on-going changes within each of the ministries. These include the impacts of mental health reform, downloading of responsibility for social assistance and welfare to municipalities and adjustments in the area of social housing. Very little new social housing has been built in the recent past as a result of both the province and the federal governments exiting this field. The government's decision to transfer approximately 5,400 units of supportive housing to Health and devolve more than 12,000 units to municipalities has the potential to weaken a supportive housing system that helps severely homeless persons to access and maintain housing. The current challenge is to fund and manage the existing stock of social housing, which includes significant numbers of supportive housing units, out of the property tax base.

Both the Provincial and Toronto Task Forces on homelessness were critical of the lack of coordination among Provincial ministries and within the extensive system of frontline agencies that provide services directly. Although homeless agencies welcome better coordination of the services they provide, they are concerned that they are being forced to scramble to retain funding or make do with less. Thus, the willingness to do more with less is undermined by the strain placed on resources.

The many approaches to homelessness include preventing homelessness through landlord/tenant mediation, nursing clinics, faith-based out of the cold programs, housing help, peer based information and referral services, crisis lines as well as the standard soup kitchens, clothing programs, shelters and showers. Notwithstanding

a lack of individual resources, community based agencies are creating umbrella groups such as Ottawa's Alliance to End Homelessness to provide on-going support and advice that will benefit homeless people in need of help. As well, suburban communities such as Peel Region—not usually perceived to have “urban” problems such as homelessness—are forming coalitions to work together.

Written by:  
*Supportive Housing Coalition*

### **Ontario Roundtable on Best Practices Addressing Homelessness Toronto, April 19, 1999**

*“Networks are the way we do action-reflection, leading to innovation. Too many groups are isolated, wondering if they are doing the right thing.”*

—Brigitte Witkowski,  
*Supportive Housing Coalition*

The Ontario Roundtable on Best Practices Addressing Homelessness brought together about 35 front-line workers from all parts of the province. As Brigitte Witkowski observed in her opening remarks, the gathering revealed what a pervasive problem homelessness has become. Downloading of formerly provincial services to municipalities in Ontario as well as the chronic shortage of affordable housing means that homelessness is no longer just a big city problem.

The event brought together people from Barrie, Brampton, Cambridge, Chatham, Hamilton, Kenora, Kingston, London, Newmarket, Ottawa, Sault Ste. Marie, Thunder Bay, Toronto, Welland, and Windsor. The roundtable format made it possible for communities with less experience in coping with the needs of homelessness to learn from those with more experience. Also, those who are working in long-established programs could be refreshed by the ideas and innovations of those in newer programs.



### **Why did people come?**

Participants were invited to describe their motivations for coming to the roundtable. Most had come to learn: about possible resources and sources of funding, about what was working elsewhere and what pitfalls to avoid, about new ideas and gaps in service. Some were looking for opportunities to build partnership with other agencies and programs. Many people expressed the desire to talk about causes and prevention, not just band-aid solutions and to have some input into policy making. A few who were feeling the effects of burnout wanted to gain inspiration and stimulation from others.

### **What is working?**

The first task of the day was to share the "best practices" known to participants and to identify elements common to these different programs.

The programs discussed included:

- all types of shelters, hostels, and supportive housing for men, women, youths, and families;
- community development initiatives and employment training programs;
- food banks and soup kitchens;
- harm reduction strategies;
- housing referral programs and helplines;
- Out of the Cold programs;
- public health and nursing programs;
- services for Aboriginal peoples;
- services for people recently discharged from jail;
- services for people with psychiatric problems or dual disorders (psychiatric problems/addictions, psychiatric problems/disabilities);
- services for refugees;
- services for youth;
- street patrols;
- support networks that bring program workers together.

### **What makes a program successful?**

Participants identified a number of common elements in programs that succeeded in terms

of meeting the needs of clients or achieving stated goals. Perhaps the two most frequently mentioned attributes of success were:

- coordination and cooperation among agencies, including ways of sharing resources, joint training programs, and ensuring a continuum of services while avoiding unnecessary duplication;
- the involvement of clients and former clients in developing and delivering programs: one group used the expression "wounded healers" to describe peer counselling services delivered by formerly homeless people; another group mentioned the importance of not imposing middle-class ideas about housing on programs; a third group spoke of letting clients decide what safe and secure housing means.

Other important lessons that had been learned included:

- allowing time for planning and relationship-building;
- balancing the needs of the individual and the needs of the larger community;
- being clear about what a program can and cannot achieve, not creating unrealistic expectations;
- creating flexible programs that can change to meet new needs;
- creating infrastructure to support networking;
- dealing with the whole person, using a multi-service approach;
- ensuring that programs are culturally relevant to the people they serve (for example, special programs may be needed for Aboriginals or same-sex couples);
- getting the entire community involved and drawing resources from the community;
- going beyond band-aid solutions to dealing with root causes of homelessness and working on prevention;
- keeping in mind that individuals may not move through programs in a linear way but use services in a cyclical way;
- not getting locked into programs: if something stops working, stop doing it.

### **The pros and cons of the best practices approach**

After the break, the participants re-formed into new groups to discuss the pros and cons of the best practices approach taken for this series of roundtables.

The benefits of the approach were generally felt to be the creation of universal standards and a common language for talking about solutions to homelessness. Labelling something a "best practice" can validate the work of a group and motivate others. Sharing best practices also means that people who are new to the field do not need to reinvent the wheel when they start up a new program. The approach invites reflection on what has been and can be achieved, and allows workers to develop a checklist of matters that need to be considered in creating a new program or improving an existing program.

Participants felt that the most likely use of the approach would be for funders, who could use it to evaluate programs. A program that had been identified as a best practice would have credibility with funders. Best practices should be used as a starting point, however, not as something that can be duplicated exactly in other places and situations.

Participants also had reservations about the best practices approach. Many saw it as potentially limiting, an approach that stifles creativity. They suggested that focusing on best practices can lead to cookie-cutter, one-size-fits-all responses that fail to take into account the diverse problems and contexts surrounding homelessness. What works in one place may not work in another.

Others suggested that establishing best practices might simply set the bar rather than raising the bar, or even turn into the lowest common denominator in practice. They also pointed out that in talking or writing about best practices, the tendency was to focus only on the positive and to ignore problems and failures, even though these may have been crucial learning experiences. Documentation on best practices may also

overlook the lengthy process that a group took to get to a successful outcome and look only at the finished product.

There is also a danger that in trying to emulate best practices, people may be tempted to deal with the easiest, most tractable problems, "creaming off" the clients with the fewest problems, and avoiding the tougher issues. Another danger is that a so-called best practice program may become entrenched and remained unchanged for years, even though the needs of its clients have changed.

One group felt that the term itself was a barrier. "Best" suggests comparisons and competition. In talking about unique programs there can be no "best" practice. Also, the competitive connotation is the opposite of the cooperation that participants identified as essential in working with the homeless. "Practices" is too static a word, focused on the past and on what already exists, rather than what might be needed in future or on gaps in service. This group suggested an alternative term—workable options—that suggests only "what we know works at a certain place in certain circumstances."

Some participants suggested that a "best failures" conference could be as instructive as a best practices roundtable. Others suggested that talking about "best principles" would be a more appropriate way of sharing success stories. Another group repeated the importance of involving clients and users: they should be the ones to define what is or is not a "best practice/best principle/workable option." Still others felt that networking would overcome the sense of competition and the risk of using cookie-cutter, piecemeal approaches. One group suggested that best practices should be used only to inform decision-making, not to determine outcomes.

### **The hows and whys of networking**

The final part of the roundtable was a discussion on networking itself. In enumerating the benefits of networking, participants often reiterated the

motivations for participating that they had mentioned at the beginning of the day: the opportunity to learn what others are doing, to build partnerships, to come together for advocacy and encouragement.

Participants listed dozens of existing networks at the local, regional, and national levels and discussed what more might be needed. Many people suggested making more use of the Internet, although not everyone has easy access to the technology. Others mentioned the fact that networking is much easier in large centres; in the north, where communities are smaller and farther apart, networking takes more planning. Some participants saw a need for an national information clearinghouse on homelessness issues. Others wanted a network that would act as a focus for promoting changes in social policy.

#### **Recommendations and reminders**

Throughout the day, participants made recommendations and stated messages that they felt funders, especially the government, needed to understand. At the end of the day, the group reviewed these ideas.

"Governments need to trust that communities know what they need and will use funding they receive in a way that is best for the community."

"It's important to de-emphasize the 'treatment' aspect of dealing with homelessness. We need to destigmatize homelessness and the problems that go with it."

"Planning takes time. Many funders don't realize this."

"Programs need core funding, not project funding, which is short-term and unstable."

"Relationship building is difficult and time-consuming, but essential, a fact that most funding formulas fail to recognize."

"We need a broad, non-middle-class definition of housing. In places like Toronto, where space is at a premium, we need to rethink what housing is and what it looks like. We need to keep going back to the clients for their views, for their definitions."

"We need to make allies in the government."

# **PRAIRIES, NUNAVUT AND NORTHWEST TERRITORIES REGIONAL ROUNDTABLE**

---

## **Observations on Homelessness**

### **Regional background report for the Prairies and Northwest Territories Roundtable on Best Practices Addressing Homelessness**

Our country is vast and differs throughout the regions; however, the events in one part of the country impact another. This is good, as we are able to share resources, and hopefully some solutions to the problems that arise. Homelessness in our country is a critical focus of attention. The following observations are based on experiences and discussions with people in this region.

Each city has different dynamics and relationships that are useful in coming to grips with the issues. Edmonton has developed a strong model of collaboration with front-line agencies. Problems related to homelessness of youth are major concerns. The shortage of affordable housing is a chief concern.

The greatest need in Yellowknife is to provide permanent housing for older and middle age men with health problems, both physical and mental. Approximately 60-70% of this population is Aboriginal.

In the mid 1990s, groups of Calgarians started to meet to study the issues in a more organized manner; these groups included people who were struggling with poverty and homelessness. A study commissioned by Alberta Health in 1997 focused on homeless people who were living in shelters. Many of the men were the working poor. They had travelled to this part of the country in search of employment opportunities but did not realize that the vacancy rate for apartments was less than 1% and rents were beyond their means. It was estimated that approximately 3,800 Calgarians experienced homelessness as a reality. It was thought that 10,000 people were near homeless and for 130,000 of the working poor the struggle to have a safe place to live was a constant threat. There are the "hidden

homeless" who reside with relatives and friends until problems develop and then they face homelessness; individuals and families experience this problem. Cities in this region are coming to understand this broader definition and are attempting to look for solutions.

The characteristics of the population are changing. In Calgary, a study has indicated that 20% of homeless people had a higher level of education and 50% had never been homeless before. These people were using the shelters and other support facilities in an attempt to save money for security deposits. There is support from the private sector to work with the provincial and municipal government on long term solutions. The "NIMBY" attitude is a problem that requires much work in the city.

The Aboriginal people living in the urban areas are experiencing even more complex problems. There appears to be a lack of housing on the reserves, so people gravitate to the urban area. The social network with the extended family and elders is not present in the same ways. There is often a sense of lack of community and unemployment is high. This is a challenge for any caring city. Winnipeg is one western city that is not only aware of the complexity but is also moving forward with creative efforts. One example is the Native Women's Transition Centre, a "best practice" endeavour. Each city will grapple with the problems and search for solutions based upon the strengths of the community.

More than 50% of the homeless in Saskatoon are Aboriginal people. Saskatoon is a major health centre for the province; accommodation for the people who come to the city for this reason is a challenge.

In Regina there is an increasing thrust to look at one's living environment in a more integrated manner as one of the determinants of health. One's satisfaction with the home environment



is directly related to one's overall health and well-being. In addition to acknowledging that everyone needs a home, its quality, the opportunity for ownership and the connectedness within the community are equally important.

The magnitude of problems has challenged the private sector, province and cities to address the immediate crisis requirements and work toward longer-term solutions. Each city will be challenged to move forward, as immediate, creative solutions are required. There is much to be done and these challenges are opportunities for a caring society.

Written by:  
*Calgary Urban Project Society*

**Prairie, Nunavut and Northwest Territories Roundtable on Best Practices Addressing Homelessness  
Calgary, April 26, 1999**

**Purpose:**

A Regional Roundtable on Best Practices Addressing Homelessness was held in Calgary on April 26, 1999. Forty participants, from Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and the Northwest Territories offered their unique insights and perspectives, including "front-line" workers, people who were/had been homeless, some staff from government, not-for-profit agencies and other backgrounds.

The following were the objectives for the day:

1. To network, that is to get to know each other, share experiences and insights about "best practices" that we have seen.
2. To discuss ways that we can more effectively network and support each other.
3. To identify qualities of "best practices" that are important.
4. To discuss how we can learn from "best practices" and use them to improve what we do in other cities, agencies, contexts.
5. To select a representative to attend the National Roundtable in June.

This report provides a synthesis of the key points of discussion and views expressed by participants. Each objective will be addressed.

**Objectives 1 & 2:**

The interactions at the events assisted us to appreciate each other and some of the work that is being done. The participant list were circulated to all participants. As well, the participants shared initiatives within their own agencies that could be termed "Best Practices". This information was circulated. The ten "Best Practices" provided by CMHC prior to the event set the tone for sharing excellent experiences.

**Objective 3:**

***Session #1: Qualities that make a "BEST"***

Participants were grouped randomly into four discussion groups to provide a broader view of service areas, and asked to consider, although not be constrained by, three "guiding questions". A synthesis of group comments follows each question.

1. *What is it about a program, a process, an organization, a facility or a solution that make it a "BEST"?*

Participants felt that a "best practice" needs to: focus on action-oriented results; be practical; achieve high satisfaction levels; include consumers' and staffs' knowledge/gifts; be respectful and engaging/inclusive; develop relationships between people/communities; be transferable to other organizations; ensure that community has a feeling of ownership; focuses on a target group and on "what we do best", not trying to be everything to everybody; has clear goals and communication; is a service based on individual needs; has flexibility; involves critical self-evaluation; is adaptable; recognizes and plans for client setback; is oriented to long-term needs of clients; is

oriented to long-term needs of clients; is not restrictive; decreases barriers to access; works for systemic change on both individual and macro levels; develops hope in the face of being overwhelmed; gives models/starting points; is safe, environmentally appropriate; is affordable and available; is not over-regulated; and engages surrounding community.

"Best Practices" usually involve: strong leadership; an ability to bridge gaps between "systems" and communities; a strong network base/collaboration with grassroots; advocacy/social action as an integral part of the vision/structure of the agency; a strong relationship with corporate sector; "balanced" Boards of Directors ("high profile" people, experienced staff/volunteers, consumers, street-front agencies).

2. *How would you recognize a "BEST" if it were standing in front of you? What are the obvious and perhaps not-so-obvious signs?*

Participants felt that common attributes are: clients feel good; client ownership and involvement; client choice; community partnership in service delivery; opportunity to grow and change; client accountability; public education with community support; volunteer participation; measurable results for each service/population; "results" of varying kinds—"people" results, quality of life, and "administrative" results (accountability, cost effective); agency has good/high profile with community/media; and results are shared with community.

3. *How do others, clients, staff, the broader community, the business community, government staff / politicians understand and respond to a "BEST"? What are the benefits of doing something "BEST"?*

Some of the benefits are: people/clients feel respected and have a sense of belonging; credibility; political/public support; ability to attract financial resources; fosters a team

approach e.g. "service mapping" in Saskatoon (where the various services in the city were collectively mapped and provided to participating agencies); "Action Committee" in Calgary; nobody dies; attract more consumers; and outcomes are measurable.

#### **Objective 4**

##### ***Session #2: Learning, Then Doing! (Transferring "Best Practices")***

Session #2 provided an opportunity for participants to choose and focus on the unique needs of one service type/target population as they considered the question of how to most effectively learn and transfer "best practices" from one setting to another. After some discussion, three suggested service areas were identified for the larger group to consider: (1) emergency housing/shelters; (2) affordable housing; and (3) families and youth. Some examples from those discussions are described below.

##### ***(1) Emergency housing/shelters***

**Transferability Principles:** Participants identified the following as principles that are transferable across locales—the need for: "protocol transfers" e.g. family violence protocols can be used as a model to develop homeless/crisis protocols; minimum barrier models to access funding and for client access to services; systemic changes to develop an intersectoral approach; community economic development; multi-disciplinary teams; ensuring equal representation on boards; collaborative planning; and continuum of services.

**Best Practices:** One agency provides case management/follow up on behalf of client, not in terms of specific agency. Participants emphasized the need for: continuum from transitional housing to long term housing ; funding for first and last month's rent, utility hook up; community follow-up program (instrumental and social, emotional needs); and partnerships between police and agencies;

## (2) Affordable housing

**Transferability Principles:** Participants noted the importance of: sustainability; cooperatives; trusts (land and housing); affordability; private sector involvement; opportunity for federal government to be active in continuation of "Best Practices" approaches; supported independent living for some mental health issues; and mechanisms to implement plans

**Best Practices:** Examples are: Community Action Plan in Calgary; some SROs (single room occupancies) work well (such as the York Hotel in Calgary); rent geared to income seniors' apartments—Trinity Foundation and the social/emotional/health care supports; Currie Barracks—response to homelessness with flexible rent payment process and sense of community between Canada Lands Corporation, City of Calgary, Calgary Home Builders' Association; strong co-operatives in Edmonton; Habitat for Humanity; a best practice of Saskatchewan Housing Corporation: New Beginnings—has used workers co-op to enhance income security; Women's Construction Coop; need for long term support of owners; regional resource committees to help non profits for facilitation with agencies willing to do work; and national and regional supports for networking and sharing information.

## (3) Families and Youth

**Transferability Principles:** Common principles are: document/analyse data and findings to create awareness; share research and use internet to educate; network service, housing and client organizations; strengthen families through mentoring; relate service needs and delivery to the needed changes in social services policy; document needed services, housing, income support to families and groups not being looked after by the system.

**Best Practices:** Examples are: Community Action Plans; 24 hour support, referrals, counselling safe environment in Rossbrook House (Winnipeg); Closer To Home—cooperative which provides Aboriginal Families at risk of losing their children

an opportunity for home environment. Servants Anonymous Society provides women with a safe home to learn skills and move out of sex trade. Bridging the Gap is a program for youth up to 24 that provides an opportunity to establish relationships. Need to develop emergency housing for families who do not fit the criteria. e.g. abusive relationship. Concern regarding the fact that children are apprehended if families are homeless.

## Session #3: COALITIONS and NIMBY (not-in-my-backyard) Resistance

As a large group, participants began by discussing "positive" experiences they have had/seen related to collaboration. This was then followed by a discussion of where NIMBY comes from and how best to address it, proactively and/or manage it when faced with reactive, antagonistic situations.

### Coalitions—What we "do right" to get everyone on-board

Example offered of the recent FCM conference in Toronto, getting 61 resolutions passed, impact on getting a Federal Minister for Homelessness appointed, "1 % solution" proposal. Elements that made this initiative come together well included:

- recognition that this was a "national" problem, not just of a few large cities
- had a political "champion"
- consumers challenged "homeless industry staff", forcing discussion of tough issues
- provided a document (resolutions) that advocates in local jurisdictions could/have used to draw attention to issues and get political/community support locally
- gained media attention

Other examples of good coalitions included bringing social service agencies together in Saskatoon and Edmonton; the Action Committee on Homelessness, Calgary; and United Way initiatives (Winnipeg and Calgary). Example of working with the corporate community (Calgary) and need to have the larger corporate organizations (e.g. Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Business Associations) express

commitment and leadership, so that the individual businesses will feel it is less "risky" to align themselves with social initiatives. Must have support of local politicians to "comfort" business leaders—choice of spokesperson is important. Examples of collaboration with landlords (work with Apartment Owners Association) to provide support to tenants who may be at risk of becoming homeless, if evicted.

**NIMBY—suggestions in dealing with it**

Key is to work with surrounding community to increase understanding of issues and develop acceptable, workable solutions locally (many examples cited, including ; siting of homeless shelters; developing long-term working relationship/consultation with surrounding communities). Importance of establishing an ongoing relationship/dialogue with surrounding communities, not waiting to establish a working relationship in the context of an issue/proposal that has already created a state of conflict or mistrust. Need to work to find shared values, common outcomes, and collaboration opportunities. Need for public education to reduce stereotypes, including working through the media. Landlords need incentives to accept hard to house people; presently there is a lack of acceptance.

**Session #4: Key Learning to Pass Along to the National Roundtable**

In their concluding session, participants reached a general level of consensus on a number of important "learnings" coming out of the day's deliberations that the group felt should be conveyed to those participating in the National Roundtable. These included:

- We cannot just look at housing in isolation—or at any issue in isolation
- Need to look at services to move people toward independence—it is not simply a matter of "warehousing" people
- Find ways to break down political barriers
- Find more ways to educate people to maintain themselves in housing
- Develop local/national strategies for addressing NIMBY issues
- Look creatively at intersectoral approaches
- Must involve more consumers in homeless solutions
- Need to re-evaluate federal position re: who has responsibility for non-status urban Aboriginals, and related issues
- Look at all systems affecting peoples' lives
- Need more education about homelessness issues
- Discharging youth at 18 to live independently is "flawed legislation"
- At federal level, should assume leadership for "social marketing" of the issue
- Foster locally-driven solutions
- Programs should be driven both ways: top-down and grassroots-up
- Provide funding for a Ministry of Homelessness
- Federal level—implement method of tracking clients from entering systems to achieving healthy living environments i.e. permanent housing
- Eradicate child poverty
- Promote more community solutions/ community responsibility
- Need money/investment and to acknowledge relationship to poverty issues
- LEADERSHIP—needed locally and nationally for investment in people
- Recognize that housing is a determinant of health
- Issue of leadership—federal government must be asked to promote corporate leadership as banks could play key role in financing innovative solutions for affordable housing
- Federal and provincial governments should come to table to address issues re: funds for tailor-made programs
- RRAP (Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program) works—is a creative program and should be extended
- Homelessness affects more Aboriginals than non-Aboriginal
- Financial assistance e.g. housing for and by Aboriginals
- Policy introduced several years ago for International Year of Shelter for the



Homeless, but we need a new national strategy for investment in people's lives

- Homelessness and affordable housing issues/actions cannot be separated
- Federal government must bring partnership efforts to the table
- Federal government must get back into housing fund i.e.. federal co-op housing was successful
- Enhance federal and provincial governments' awareness of effects of homelessness on youth
- Community organizations, including 1st Nations, should come together rather than fight

**Objective 5:**

During the deliberations a process was agreed upon for the selection of a representative to attend the National Roundtable. It was the group's desire that the representative be someone who had been homeless. Sharon Starr, from Boyle Street Coop Housing Registry in Edmonton, was selected.

# **BRITISH COLUMBIA AND YUKON REGIONAL ROUNDTABLE**

---

## **Homelessness in British Columbia**

### **Regional background report for the British Columbia/Yukon Roundtable on Best Practices Addressing Homelessness**

#### ***Definition of Homelessness***

In BC, people are considered homeless when they have no housing, are living in emergency shelters, are at high risk of losing their housing and have few housing options, or who are living in inadequate, substandard and unsafe living conditions.

Examples of homelessness people include people who:

- live on streets and have no shelter (these people are the absolute homeless); rely on emergency shelters or hostels as their primary accommodation, and may be frequently and repeatedly on the streets
- are at high risk of losing their housing for lack of affordability, for example, people on low fixed incomes, the unemployed and those experiencing family break up;
- are individuals or families on low fixed incomes who spend more than 30 % of their income on shelter
- live in affordable housing which is under threat of redevelopment or conversion to higher cost housing or condominiums
- live in apartments, secondary suites or roominghouses which are unsafe because of poor maintenance, pest infestations or because of lack of security
- live in inadequate housing, including situations such as a family of ten sharing a one bedroom apartment because it is all that they can afford.

#### ***Who are the homeless?***

Traditionally the homeless were viewed as primarily older men living on the streets of the

cities, most often with alcohol or drug addictions. Today homelessness includes the seriously mentally ill, youth, seniors, women, men, the physically and mentally handicapped, immigrants, refugees, aboriginal people and single families with children. These are people who live in extreme poverty and who often have a myriad of problems to cope with. They face a much higher risk of health problems than the rest of the population.

A 1996 study found the largest number most in need of shelter and housing were men and women with multiple problems, including mental illness and substance abuse; physical disabilities and substance abuse; etc. (61%), followed by single women (44%), women with children (17%), people with mental illness (17%), families (17%), street youth (11%), and refugees/immigrants (11%) (Percentages do not add to 100% as some respondents identified more than target population as being of equal priority of need.) A 1999 Shelter Study supports this, finding 75% of shelter users abuse alcohol and/or drugs and 66% suffer from severe mental illness. It also found that aboriginal people are over represented in the homeless population.

This means that if you are a single person living on a lower fixed income, you have few housing options. Given the majority of the affordable housing (at or close to the maximum shelter component of welfare) in the province is located in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver, many of the homeless congregate in the Downtown Eastside area of Vancouver, the poorest postal code area in the country. The reason for the average low income is attributed to four major reasons: affordable housing stock in the form of SRO's, (approx. 3/4 of Vancouver's stock) acceptance and tolerance of the community, the anonymity they receive as well as the access to a wide variety of services within a small geographic area. Many of these individuals live in tiny 100 square foot rooms, some with hotplates as their cooking facilities and often share dirty toilets

and bathtubs down the hall. The Downtown Eastside of Vancouver has the most visible and highest usage of illegal drugs, an epidemic of HIV and Hepatitis C, and also has one of the highest crime rates in the country. Because of these problems, the shelterless no longer migrate solely to this area and the major city parks. In fact, despite their need for services located only in the Downtown Eastside, many shelterless are resistant to come into the area, choosing to do without, for fear of their safety. Instead they are located in every neighbourhood within the city of Vancouver and in each city and town within the province.

### *A Growing Crisis*

The number of homeless persons is increasing in BC. The shift from institutional to community-based care without the adequate transfer of funding and resources resulted in many people falling through the "cracks" of the health service system. Examples include the downsizing of the provinces mental institution from approx. 6,000 beds to 600 beds currently, with very few housing and support resources being established to take it's place. Treatment programs for substance abuse have not kept pace with the demand and have lost ground. For instance only 10 detox beds exist within the province for women contributing to people not being treated before their addictions reduce them to poverty and homelessness. Traditional licensed community care beds have also been reduced: between 1989 and 1998 there was a net loss of 483 beds despite an increasing aged population. The economic downturn has also had a significant impact. Greater numbers of people are unemployed and struggling with poverty. Waitlists for social and co-op housing are extensive, with many not having any hope of getting into an affordable unit. Food Banks and free meals services throughout the province report record requests for assistance. The Salvation Army in Downtown Eastside reports a 50% increase in daily free meal requests over the last eight years. The affordable housing stock has also been eroded by the demolition or conversion of cheaper housing to higher end housing or condominiums as well as by the

closure of illegal secondary suites and increased standards for housing. This is particularly true in the Downtown Eastside which contains more than 50% of the province's affordable housing stock. 3,800+ units have been lost over the past 15 years. At the same time, BC has experienced a 68% increase in population. Coupled with the loss of the federal government's annual housing unit allocation in 1993, severe additional strain has been placed on a housing and services system already over stretched. The result has been greater numbers of people who are homeless. Nowhere is this more clearly seen than in the provinces shelters.

Shelters throughout the province report high occupancy rates. A new phenomena has arisen since 1992; significant numbers of people trying to get beds, instead are being turned away for lack of available beds, or because of the lack of suitable beds. This is seen clearly within the Downtown Eastside where shelters operate at over 100% capacity and turn away three times as many people as they can take in. As a result, panhandling in the communities has become more desperate and aggressive, leading many municipalities to pass restrictive bylaws. "Squeegee kids" proliferated on high traffic corridors again resulting in restrictive bylaws. Merchant associations hired security guards to "move street people along". During the colder, wetter months, shelters have begun banding together with other community and government representatives to open temporary winter only beds to reduce the increased health risks the shelterless face during inclement weather. This success has been mitigated by prolonged and active resistance from communities who reject the establishment of housing for higher risk people, most notably against shelters. A notable exception to this has been the Marpole neighbourhood which has assisted in meeting the needs of the shelter.

### *Contributing Factors*

Income assistance rates were reduced for singles to a maximum of \$325 for rent and \$175 for food, clothing and other necessities, reducing their

ability to find affordable housing. Many pay over \$350 per month (average provincial rent for 1 bedroom apartment is \$450 a month) leading to poorer nutrition with the commiserate health related problems and costs that arise from this.

It is well recognized in BC that housing is the basis for health. Without housing, people cannot be treated appropriately for medical, mental or addiction needs. Education and training are not possible. Housing itself however is not the total answer, suitable support services must also be offered where needed to ensure that people are successful in maintaining the most appropriate independent living situation as possible.

### ***Responsibilities***

In BC, the provincial government through the Ministry of Human Resources is responsible for income assistance and emergency hostel or shelter stays of less than 30 days. The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Investment is responsible for housing through BC Housing and Management Commission. The Ministry of Health undertakes funding support aspects of housing for people with disabilities such as the mentally ill. The Ministry of Families and Children are responsible for services and shelter for youths (e.g. safe houses) as well as financially supporting rehab services through its Alcohol and Drug Programs. Much of the responsibility for supporting health services is in the process of devolving from the province to regional health boards.

### ***Range of Services to the Homeless***

Service range from crisis services such as the shelters, ambulance, clinics, hospitals, emergency mental health (Car 87), police to long term supportive services and housing. However their capacity to meet the needs is compromised by too few resources and too little funding. Treatment services for medical and mental health problems are available. Outreach Workers provide supports to people in the community, as do home care workers, home nurses, meals on wheels, etc.

Many services offer support in a flexible, non judgmental manner, responding to the needs of the people in need. We are challenged however to review services to ensure that the manner in which they are offered enables them to be truly effective in meeting the growing complexity of needs of a more street entrenched population.

Rising to the challenge are innovative housing programs. In the Downtown Eastside the purchase of SRO's to be operated by a non-profit organization helps maintain housing stock and improves people's living environment. The Coast Foundation built and DERA is renovating housing by partnering with businesses. Lookout joins with the private sector in a different manner, by replacing support staff within owner operated buildings. These, and many others have only become possible by BCHMC and civic governments working closely with non-profit organization in a newly evolving flexible housing strategy.

*Written by:  
Lookout Emergency Aid Society*

### **British Columbia/Yukon Roundtable on "Best Practices" Addressing Homelessness Vancouver, April 23, 1999**

***"The true answer to homelessness is homes."***

*—Karen O'Shannacery, Executive Director,  
Lookout Emergency Society*

The British Columbia/Yukon regional Roundtable on Best Practices Addressing Homelessness brought together forty individuals from all areas of the province, including one guest from the Yukon. The group included consumers, funders, government and front line service providers and represented smaller as well as major urban centres. Their clients include youth, men, women, and seniors as well as the aboriginal, ethnic and people with disabilities. The services ranged from shelters, drop-ins and safe houses to advocacy, health, outreach and special needs, provided to single people, couples and families.



There was general agreement that a "best practices" approach is beneficial to all parties provided that the criteria are not "cast in stone" or used as a tool to curtail or eliminate programs and services to homeless people. Ideally, "best practices" incorporates a seamless continuum of services which supports clients/consumers from the street through to independent or supported permanent housing.

### **The Regional Perspective**

The starting point for the discussion was the Background document provided to participants before the event. In acknowledging the points made in this assessment of regional issues, a number of critical points were highlighted:

- The alarming increase in the numbers of youth as well as adults living on the streets throughout the province (this is less true in the Yukon because of the severity of the climate), with more than 50 percent of youth coming from outside the province. It was noted that there are different "ages of majority" across the country, which results in a "hit and miss" approach to treatment and support for transient young people. The group agreed that a common standard for the definition of "youth" should be created. Participants commented that focusing more recognition and appropriate support for young people would go a long way towards preventing future multiple problems and homelessness.
- A lack of shelter beds throughout the province results in large numbers of people being turned away from accommodation. The group felt that more shelter beds are necessary as a critical part of the housing continuum, while acknowledging that shelters are a "band aid" rather than the solution.
- The deinstitutionalization of mentally ill persons without the requisite development of housing and support services in the community was seen as a major cause of the rising numbers of shelterless, vulnerable street people. The solutions are not limited to funding appropriate services and housing but

must embrace the attitudes of communities that refuse to deal with their own problems (NIMBY). It would also be helpful to proclaim as yet unimplemented sections of B.C.'s progressive child welfare legislation.

### **Initial Review of "Best Practices"—What Does "Best Practice" Mean to Me?**

This session began with presentations from a funder, a service provider and a number of people with experience of being homeless (consumers). The essential qualities of best practices include building quality relationships and connections between the providers and those needing the services based on honesty, respect and acceptance (defined as being non-judgemental).

From the service provider's perspective, "best practices" are about demonstrating that everyone has something to learn in each situation, navigating through difficulties and sticking with people when there are setbacks. "You cannot make people change," several participants noted. "And you cannot predict and prevent every harm that may come to them." Accordingly, collaborative community relations develop over time and should not just respond to crises.

From the perspective of the funder, "best practices" help demonstrate that public funds are being spent responsibly and help decision makers understand that providing appropriate housing and services is an investment, not just a social value.

Three consumers talked about the destructive force of being homeless, vulnerability issues, and how difficult it is to access the necessary support resources in order to make the hard decisions necessary to move towards a healthy, stable lifestyle. "Best practices" from their perspective mean having physical, emotional and mental safety, flexible programs, continued outreach and a continuum of proactive rather than reactive services. The consumers' experiences helped their fellow participants grasp the value of abandoning exclusionary criteria regarding age, addictions and the use of alcohol.

An example was described in suburban Surrey, where in a two year period more than 500 people with no fixed address were turned away from a hospital emergency room. Close to a third had mental illness and many were making multiple visits. Effective "best practices" also do not deflect responsibility and their common sense application helps reduce bureaucratic blocks. "Best Practices" also is the meaningful involvement of consumers on program development and service review.

### **The Benefits of Improving Networks**

As an example of how forming and improving networks can be beneficial, a report was received from the fledgling B.C. Provincial Shelter Providers Network. This group recently met for the first time to address how to improve service quality and share common concerns. The meeting was made possible as a direct result of the networking activity stimulated by the "Roundtables Addressing Best Practices in Homelessness" initiative. The group agreed that expectations for an effective network include reducing isolation, sharing information, frustrations and successes, enabling common planning around obstacles and jointly exploring options and ideas. Another key benefit of networks is the opportunity to influence policy and effect change through advocacy. The shelter network plans to link with other housing networks, allowing stronger regional representation while accounting for different priorities. The group concurred that networks are valuable regionally, provincially and nationally and urged support for this approach from all levels of government.

### **Principal Issues for the National Roundtable**

This session resulted in several key suggestions:

- Senior levels of government should be encouraged to re-enter the field of providing housing, but the key is cooperation among all government agencies to avoid the "silo" approach to funding. "We are all part of the solution," was the sentiment. This inclusive

approach is intended to include agencies such as Health Boards, for example.

- Involvement needs to be focused on "the common problem" by delivering services in a seamless way. Funders also need to be involved from the beginning of projects to get buy in and be focused on common objectives rather than judging success by criteria applicable only to their agency.
- More effective use should be made of legislation that already exists. An example cited by the group was that official community plans may include social policies but rarely do and can be used as tools of exclusion.
- Funders should be encouraged to establish criteria more broadly and to involve consumers in the development of programs. Success should be defined to reflect the experience of consumers rather than program criteria alone.
- There is a benefit to considering homelessness in a broader context, which would encourage individual ministries to consider longer term effects that benefit other ministries in the future (i.e. investing in youth can minimize future expenditures on items such as shelters). This was described as "spending a dollar to save a dollar" on an inter-ministry basis.
- Participants were keen to have all levels of government understand the value of the "1% solution" which would result in a doubling of funding for homeless relief available for supported housing and rent supplements.
- All agreed that Canada needs to develop a national housing policy, recognizing the right to shelter.

### **Putting "Best Practices" to work**

"Best Practices" provide a common model to be shared, which reflects the current status, and are ever changing. They make a national perspective on the issues possible and are a gauge by which to measure success.

"Best Practices" build relationships, foster partnerships, inform government funders, eliminate artificial criteria for funding, break down "silos", demonstrate diversity of funding approaches, promote consistency of funding, provide ongoing stimulus for change, help stimulate and support fledgling agencies, promote public education, and are instructive for public advocates.

"Best Practices" stress human issues, promote a continuum of support, cooperation and sharing of information, client needs, stimulate working groups, provide a framework (not a template), promote ongoing attempts to improve service standards, help save time, and promote codes of ethics for front line workers.

"Best Practices" are underscored by principles and values which are central to a core of ethics. "Best Practices" address things within the control of service providers but also suggest how to deal with things beyond their control. The approach recognizes that we can come together in our diversity for a common cause, and reinforces the importance of fostering financial and other community support for the issue in such a way as to make it "our" issue.

# NATIONAL ROUNDTABLE

## National Roundtable on Best Practices Addressing Homelessness Ottawa, June 14-15, 1999

Fifty front-line workers and government staff from ten provinces and the Northwest Territories met for two days in Ottawa. Their purpose for coming together was to share their experiences, learn from each other about effective methods of addressing homelessness, and network with each other.

On the first day, participants heard presentations by representatives of the agencies whose initiatives had been documented as best practices addressing homelessness. By the end of the first day, the participants expressed a desire to discuss next steps. They wanted to take some form of direct action, as a group, to address the country-wide, systemic problems that lead to homelessness.

By the end of the roundtable, the group had taken two decisions:

1. to send representatives of the five regional roundtables to meet with Claudette Bradshaw, the federal coordinator for homelessness;
2. to seek continued support of networking among those who work with homeless people, so that they could continue to meet, share information, and take action.

Perhaps it was inevitable that so many people who work in physically and emotionally demanding jobs, often under difficult circumstances, and who see every day the human cost of recent political and economic decisions, should want to move from sharing stories to taking action.

### Day One, morning Welcome and regional reports

The co-hosts—Tom Kerwin of the Research Division of Canada Mortgage and Housing (CMHC), Rosemary Kinnis of the Federation

of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), Jocelyn Greene of Raising the Roof, and John Johnston of the Urban Core Support Network (UCSN)—welcomed the participants. All four groups have contributed in different ways to efforts to address homelessness:

- CMHC's Research Division works with various agencies that work in the area of homelessness and conducts and publishes research on homelessness, including the documentation on Best Practices Addressing Homelessness circulated to all participants;
- FCM has recently published the National Housing Policy Options Paper calling for measures that the federal and other levels of government can undertake to reduce homelessness;
- Raising the Roof is engaged in fundraising for local homelessness initiatives and is creating a Web page and searchable database for information exchange;
- UCSN hosts national conferences and links people in different cities who work in the area of homelessness.

Participants also heard from representatives of the regional roundtables.

### *Atlantic Region*

Paul O'Hara of Halifax and Kit Hickey of Saint John spoke of the isolation felt by those in the Atlantic region. Many front-line workers feel that homelessness is defined and analysed elsewhere and that they have little input into national events, such as the March 1999 symposium in Toronto. People work in "little pockets here and there" with no overall strategy or coordination. One of the priorities identified by the Atlantic region is financing for affordable and non-profit housing, and the removal of barriers such as municipal fees and new home warranty requirements.

### *Quebec*

Diane Morin of Quebec City used the analogy of agriculture to highlight the fact that different regions have different needs, and that the same



efforts may produce different results in different places. "Best practices" may not translate from one context to another. Moreover, the Quebec roundtable felt strongly that ideas are not enough, money is needed to put them into practice. No amount of ingenuity can make up for a lack of funding. Diane encouraged the federal government to reinvest in housing, and also challenged the participants, saying that the roundtable would be pointless if it did not lead to some form of concrete action.

#### **Ontario**

Brigitte Witkowski of Toronto and Jim Chicago of Kenora reminded participants that homelessness is not just an urban problem or an Aboriginal problem, it now affects small towns, suburbs, rural areas, and communities that once prided themselves on neighbourliness and mutual support. The face of homelessness is also changing, from the stereotype of the skid row dweller to youth, families, refugees and those suffering from mental illness. Dealing with these different people takes more than just a room and a key. Jim used his own experience to underline the importance of ongoing support, education, and employment in helping people establish or re-establish their independence.

#### **Prairies, Nunavut and Northwest Territories**

Lorraine Melchior of Calgary, Jo-Ann Coleman Pidskalny of Saskatoon, and Sharon Starr of Edmonton stressed that "poverty and homelessness belong to everyone." The implications of this attitude include forming partnerships or coalitions such as those that have been created in Calgary and Edmonton. They also include empowering homeless people, enabling them to take more control or ownership over their options, especially Aboriginal people, who are often left out of decision making. Finally, they include tackling NIMBYism, discrimination, and intolerance.

#### **British Columbia and Yukon**

Karen O'Shannacery of Vancouver reinforced this idea by saying that "we are all part of the solution." Government agencies should not be able to pass the buck or to operate in isolation

from each other. Consumers must be involved in identifying what they need and what success looks like. Karen also endorsed the "1% solution." This is a proposal first put forward by the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee (TDRC). According to the TDRC, all levels of government, federal, provincial and municipal, currently spend about 1% of their total budgets on housing and related services to low-income people. TDRC estimated that spending 2% would be enough to eradicate mass homelessness in Canada.

#### **Day One, afternoon Workshops**

Participants had an opportunity to hear first-hand about elements of nine of the ten "best practices" described in detail in the documentation. In order not to repeat information available in the CMHC report, *Documentation of Best Practices Addressing Homelessness*, this report will mention only a few highlights.

#### ***Innovation and Continuum of Care in Responding to the Needs of Youth***

Tim Crooks of Phoenix Youth Programs in Halifax stressed the importance of taking care of the organization and its staff as well as the people served by the organization. Staff at Phoenix Youth go on retreats individually and collectively to re-energize and regroup and to talk about ways to improve the service. Tim also talked about the importance of regular outside evaluation. Phoenix Youth Programs invited MBA students to carry out a review that helped the organization refocus its efforts.

#### ***Enhancing Services for Homeless Women— Developing a More Integrated Approach***

Chris Downing of Sandy Merriman House in Victoria described her organization's responses to homeless women's needs for flexible scheduling and services. She also discussed the problem of funders who require the agency to reapply annually for funding, which makes long-term planning difficult.

***The "Life Project" and the Enterprise-School Approach***

Sylvie Tremblay of the Centre résidentiel et communautaire Jacques-Cartier in Quebec City also struggles with the problem of annual funding and of having to prove the centre's value over and over again to funders. The low level of funding also means that salaries are low. The centre helps youth develop life skills and reconnect them to education, employment and society: youth become members rather than clients and tackle a "life project" that involves setting goals and making a commitment to achieving them.

***Resident Involvement—the Mediation Process and Planning for StreetCity III***

Ken Davies of Homes First Society in Toronto described the creation of StreetCity I (due to be replaced by StreetCity III), StreetCity II (Strachan House), and StreetCity III (still on the drawing board), and how the lessons learned in each version have been applied to the next. He explained the mediation process used to resolve disputes between tenants or between tenants and staff. He stressed that the more staff work on community development, the less need there is for mediation, because small problems are caught before they turn into major disagreements. He also mentioned the problem of NIMBYism in choosing a site for StreetCity III: he finds that politicians and MPs are supportive unless the proposed site is in their riding or ward.

***Meeting the Needs of the Hard to House—Flexible and Client-Centred Responses***

Karen O'Shannacery of Lookout Emergency Aid Society in Vancouver deals with people who fall between the cracks, people who are not served by other agencies and have nowhere else to turn. For Karen, the watchword is "flexibility, flexibility, flexibility." The client must be the one who wins. There are very few unbendable rules and staff are always prepared to innovate: if one approach doesn't work, they try another. They also take care to ensure that clients understand why any particular decision has been made that affects them. Karen stressed the importance of treating staff well, which pays off in low turnover and burn-out rates.

***Poverty and its Impact on Children***

Sister Lesley Sacouman of Rossbrook House in Winnipeg talked about the effects of poverty on children. The worst problem for children is hopelessness, brought on by exclusion, humiliation and powerlessness. When racism is added to poverty (Rossbrook House mainly sees Aboriginal children), children may end up feeling guilty for being alive. Those who come to Rossbrook often have nothing to lose, which means that they have the potential for enormous creativity, or for violent destruction. Rossbrook is open all day every day, so that any child who does not want to be alone has to be alone. It is staffed mostly by people who first came there as children.

***Organization Longevity—Remaining Flexible and Responsive***

Mary-Martha Hale of the Anglican Social Services Centre in Ottawa described how the program run by Anglican Social Services has changed since its creation in 1954, by responding to changing needs. Even its philosophy has changed, from charity to social justice. It survives partly because of its flexibility, but also because of support from the community and the church and stable funding. Staff are well paid and most have been there for more than 10 years, which provides continuity.

***The Lateral Organizational Model and its Rationale***

Anita Neis of the Native Women's Transition Centre and Memengwaa House in Winnipeg works with native women and children who are the victims of abuse and neglect. She used the image of the butterfly (*memengwaa* means butterfly in Ojibwa) to describe the organization's inclusive structure that encourages all staff to participate. The image also applies to the women themselves, who are given a safe place (a "cocoon") to shelter and recover from their problems and then encouraged to spread their wings and become independent.

### ***Developing and Maintaining a Multi-Sectoral Approach***

Judy Bader of the Community and Social Development Department in Calgary talked about Calgary's Action Plan and the Calgary Homeless Foundation, a multi-sectoral approach to reducing homelessness in the city. The initiative has succeeded largely because of high-profile leadership in the business community and support from the mayor and premier. Also, the leaders found that success builds on success and that getting tangible results early on encourages more people to participate.

Certain themes connected the nine different presentations, including the importance of:

- tailoring services to clients or residents, and not imposing too many rules;
- encouraging clients or residents to be autonomous, not dependent;
- helping children and youth escape the cycle of poverty;
- being able to change and, if necessary, reinvent the organization as community needs change;
- working with other organizations to provide a continuum of services;
- getting and keeping stable core funding;
- treating staff well, paying them appropriately, and giving them opportunities to learn and participate in decision making.

The day ended with a wrap-up to discuss what had been learned and to begin planning the second day. Many participants felt that they had absorbed a great deal of information and that rather than spend another day exchanging more information, they wanted to create an action plan for next steps.

### ***Day Two, morning Rewriting the Agenda***

The participants decided to forgo the planned workshops and spend the day creating the building blocks of an action plan. This process began with identifying some broad directions that the group as a whole might take. Eight groups were formed to develop general recommendations.

During this process and the plenary discussion that followed, participants stated repeatedly that it was essential to get governments to invest more in housing and related services. Most people acknowledged that this would not be an easy task (one person described it as "pushing with a rope"), but all seemed to feel that without federal government involvement, homelessness would continue to increase.

At the same time, there was hope that the recent appointment of Minister Bradshaw, the Toronto symposium, the FCM *National Housing Policy Options Paper*, and other well-publicized events indicated a climate in which change at the national level was possible. Information and statistics are widely available, reducing the need to "study" the problem endlessly. Recommendations from numerous sources, such as the *Report of the Mayor's Homelessness Action Task Force* (Golden Report) in Ontario or *Nowhere to Live* in British Columbia, point the way for action.

Homelessness is also receiving more media coverage, although some participants commented that the public's attention span is short and there were signs that the public was wearying of the subject and becoming cynical. In many places intolerance towards the poor seems to be increasing.

Many participants wanted to maintain the networks that were being established during the regional and national roundtables, although some people felt it was important not to reinvent existing mechanisms for networking, or to compete with existing organizations for funding.

By mid-morning, the eight groups had come up with a variety of recommendations, which were organized into nine major initiatives:

1. ways to keep the network going;
2. stopping the further devolution of the federal role in housing;
3. sending a message to Minister Bradshaw, copied to local MPs and municipal politicians;

4. drafting a public statement for the media;
5. ways to help the government ministries work together and to work with the government;
6. fundraising;
7. increasing public awareness of the problem;
8. taking immediate action here and now;
9. carrying out research on the costs and benefits of investing in measures to end homelessness.

When participants were asked which ideas they wanted to work on, most people opted for 2, 3, 4, and 7. The group divided into four smaller groups to work on these ideas.

#### **Day Two, afternoon Conclusion**

##### ***Making a Public Statement***

The largest group discussed a public statement. The group discussed both general principles and specific recommendations, but eventually decided that given the time available, and given the many other statements advanced by other groups, it would be more useful to concentrate on logistics. The group therefore came to a decision that a delegation of regional representatives would request a meeting with Minister Bradshaw, preferably before her five-week tour begins on July 5, but during the tour if necessary.

##### ***Increasing Public Awareness***

The group that discussed public awareness suggested publicizing:

1. stories of real people to put a face on the abstract notion of "homelessness";
2. stories that illustrate the difference between house and home, the need for a variety of supports, and the complexity of the issue;
3. information on the costs and benefits of investing in housing and housing supports, to show the public the long-term wisdom of helping homeless people now.

Participants discussed how these approaches might be created and funded. The participants' comments indicated a dilemma.

- If we tell stories about people who have been helped, we make it appear that the situation is under control, and that sufficient means

exist to help homeless people turn their lives around.

- If we tell stories about people who are still struggling to combat addictions or other problems, we may increase intolerance and cynicism, rather than decreasing it.

##### ***Involving the Federal Government***

The group that talked about refocusing the federal role felt that a good start would be endorsing the FCM's *National Housing Policy Options Paper*. This group also felt that a five-year plan was needed, explaining that it was not good business practice to go through an annual re-submission process for funding. The group suggested creating a set of expectations for the provincial and federal governments, to guide their decision making.

##### ***Sending a Message to the Minister***

The group that worked on messages for Minister Bradshaw drafted a set of statements and a checklist of questions that she could use in her cross-country tour. Later, the whole group contributed additional messages and questions. The text of the letter is appended to this report.

The participants also agreed that it would be valuable to meet on a regular basis. John Johnston of the Urban Core Support Network offered to send a letter to CMHC asking for funding for networking opportunities similar to the national roundtable.

Terry Vida from Minister Bradshaw's office addressed the group. She reminded the group that Claudette Bradshaw is acting as a federal coordinator, rather than as a minister, and that in her work on homelessness she is supported by a secretariat, not a full ministry. She explained that Minister Bradshaw will be meeting with an interdepartmental policy committee to discuss ways in which policies and procedures can be revised to better address homelessness. Terry stated that she would recommend that the minister meet with agencies present at the roundtable.

The group discussed the importance of sending representatives to meet with the Minister. People were anxious to see some action before the end of



the summer. For one thing, new initiatives should be developed in time to include them in the fall Speech from the Throne. For another, as one participant from Toronto said, "This is June, which means that winter is six months away in Toronto and closer than that in many other cities. Every winter we bury homeless people. We need action and we need it now."

Participants met briefly in their regional groupings to review the two days. The regional groups nominated a representative (in most cases a co-host of the regional roundtable) to meet with the Minister.

At the end of the day, the facilitators asked participants for a "soundbite" on their impressions of the two days. The responses included:

- "The point is still: Show me the money."
- We came to learn, but we are excited by the opportunity to take action."
- "The solutions exist. We just have to make them happen."
- We've been very focused, considering the large size of the group."
- "I've found a new resolve to keep working."

- We've developed a certain solidarity that we must maintain."
- "We have discovered our shared values and have supported each other, even if only in the craziness and futility of it all."
- "Despite our diversity, people are really on the same page."
- I'm impressed by the commitment and energy."
- "Housing is still a basic need."

Tom Kerwin closed the roundtable by expressing a commitment by CMHC to:

1. maintain liaison with the participants;
2. keep working towards change;
3. work with Minister Bradshaw's office to address homelessness in Canada.

The National Roundtable co-hosts provided summary comments on the value of this event.



## **Letter to Minister Bradshaw**

June 29, 1999

The Honourable Claudette Bradshaw  
Minister of Labour and Federal Coordinator for Homelessness  
Phase 2, Place du Portage, 11th Floor  
165 Hotel de Ville  
Hull (Québec)  
K1A 0J2

Dear Minister Bradshaw:

We represent the National Roundtable on Best Practices Addressing Homelessness, which brought together 50 front-line workers and representatives from governments and community associations across the country for a two-day conference in Ottawa, June 14-15, 1999. This event followed five regional roundtables, which involved more than 200 people from all ten provinces and two of the territories. As representatives of the five regions, we were chosen by the attendees at the national conference to speak for front-line workers across the country on the important issue of homelessness.

We want to support your efforts as federal coordinator for homelessness and to work with you in helping to reduce homelessness in Canada. We have prepared a summary of our perspective on the problem, based on the views expressed at the roundtable, and a checklist of questions that you may find useful as you travel across the country to learn more about homelessness. We would also like to arrange a meeting with you, at your earliest convenience, so that we can share our experiences with you and start working towards solutions.

The following statements represent the perspective of front-line workers who deal with homelessness every day:

1. Homelessness is a crisis requiring immediate attention and action. There is no time to waste. We must work together to stop the crisis before it gets any worse.
2. It is unhealthy to be homeless. The lives and health of Canadians are at stake. Homelessness can ruin the health of adults and children, cause premature death by exposure, and exacerbate the effects of mental illness.
3. Homelessness is a national problem. It is present in every province and territory, in cities, towns, suburbs, rural areas and on reserves. No area is unaffected and no one is "immune" from the threat of homelessness. Physical or mental illness, unemployment, financial losses, bereavement, trauma—these problems can threaten any individual's housing.
4. We need to establish a national definition of homelessness quickly, so we can move on to action without delay. We can use the United Nations definition or another broad definition of the problem, but we cannot afford to spend more time redefining the problem.

5. Ending homelessness is not a "cost" to society, it is an investment in our country's future. A dollar spent today to end homelessness will save thousands of future dollars in health care, justice, corrections, hostels and emergency shelters. It will also help people who are now drawing on our country's resources to rebuild their lives and start contributing in productive ways to our country.
6. Any negotiations leading to long-term solutions must bring together federal, provincial, municipal, and non-governmental community agencies, and, where appropriate, the private sector. All have a role to play and a perspective that should be represented. By working together, we can achieve "buy-in" and develop creative, flexible approaches.
7. We must prevent homelessness, not just manage it. We cannot keep bailing out a sinking ship. The leaks must be mended. This means attacking the systemic causes of homelessness, including the severe shortage of affordable housing.
8. Homelessness is not just a housing problem. It touches on health, mental health, education, employment, transportation, justice, corrections, and Aboriginal affairs. Any solution must cross all these sectors. We must seize every opportunity to break down the barriers between government departments and between government and non-governmental agencies that stand in the way of effective intervention.
9. Solutions must be tailored to the needs of many special groups: children, youth, the aged, Aboriginals, former prisoners, immigrants, refugees, the mentally ill, and those suffering from physical disabilities or addictions. Each group requires different forms of housing and different types of support.
10. Solutions do exist; this is not a natural disaster. Human actions have caused it and human actions can put an end to it.

Within this understanding of the problem, we would like to suggest the following checklist that you may find useful in your discussions with workers and analysts across Canada in your upcoming tour.

- How does your jurisdiction/agency define homelessness?
- How has the face of homelessness changed in your community in the last few years?
- What are some of the specific local factors contributing to homelessness in your community?
- How is homelessness measured (for example, numbers using hostels, food banks, soup kitchens, overnight programs)?
- What is being done to help homeless people in your community?
- What is being done to prevent further homelessness?
- Are these efforts working? How is success defined or measured?
- Where are the gaps? What needs are not being met?
- What sources of funding are available?
- How is funding allocated?
- Which government ministries are actively involved in helping to end homelessness?
- Are there other government ministries that should be involved? How can we get them involved?
- What is the general economic impact of homelessness on your community?
- Are there institutional or structural barriers that prevent people from finding housing?

We would like to arrange a meeting with you at the earliest opportunity, to discuss these issues and to start talking about solutions. We know that you have a busy schedule, but the matter is urgent. If possible, we would prefer to meet with you in Ottawa before you begin your tour, but we are prepared to arrange a meeting during the tour if necessary. Please contact Jocelyn Greene at the coordinates listed below to arrange an acceptable meeting time. Karen O'Shannacery is available as an alternate in case your office has difficulty reaching Ms. Greene.

The reason we want to come together as a group with you, is that we have developed a national perspective on the problem, and we strongly believe that a national approach to homelessness is needed. We have talked to front-line workers and policy analysts from across Canada who are knowledgeable and committed to solving the problem, and we hope to collaborate with you in helping ensure that all Canadians are safely and securely housed.

We look forward to meeting you and wish you every success in your work as federal coordinator.

Yours sincerely,

René Charest  
Coordonnateur  
Réseau d'aide aux personnes seules et itinérantes de Montréal (RAPSIM)  
Montréal, Québec

Jim Chicago  
Street Patrol Coordinator  
Kenora, Ontario

Jocelyn Greene  
Executive Director  
Stella Burry Corporation  
St. John's, Newfoundland  
(709) 754-2072 Fax: (709) 754-6447  
e-mail: sbc@roadrunner.nf.net

Lorraine Melchior  
Executive Director  
Calgary Urban Project Society (CUPS) Community Health Centre  
Calgary, Alberta

Karen O'Shannacery  
Executive Director  
Lookout Emergency Aid Society  
Vancouver, B.C.  
(604) 255-0340 Fax: (604) 255-0790